domains within the broader chat-site. Hence, participants within the same chat-room generally share some common interest or concern, which brings them together.

Chats may be hosted by online services (such as America Online), by bulletin board services and by Web sites. Many Web sites, such as Talk City, in fact exist

5   exclusively for the purpose of conducting chats. Most chat sites use a popular protocol called Internet Relay Chat (IRC) for client-server handshaking and subsequent client-server and client-client interaction. IRC was first made public in RFC 1459, released in May 1993. Besides the exchange of text messages, a chat may also include the use of sound and graphics, provided that the bandwidth capability and appropriate programming

10   are accessible. Currently, most chat activity appears to be informal and recreational in nature. However, specialized channels where professionals exchange valuable opinions and engage in constructive dialogue are becoming increasingly prevalent.

Since, by its very nature, the content of chats is generated in real-time, it is very difficult, if not impossible to be able to classify the nature of the content exchanged in

15   chat rooms in advance of joining the chat. Even though current chat servers attempt to classify their chat rooms using general heuristics such as "Adult", "Teenagers", "Kids" and the like, and to cluster rooms accordingly, the actual content exchanged within a given room is by no means guaranteed to conform to its predefined classification. The situation becomes even more complex when chat content includes non-text data, for

20   example, audio or images. Surrounding text does not always indicate the content of the embedded file, allowing offensive audio or image material to slip through the ratings system. Occasionally, people deliberately even mislabel offensive audio or image files in order to mislead monitoring devices.

Content rating for static web pages, and also for dynamic pages (e.g., search result

25   pages) is already done using various techniques. These include Internet filters such as Net Nanny and Cyber Patrol, and the method and system disclosed in U.S. patent application serial no. 09/374644 (docket no. AM9-99-040) entitled "Automatic" Rating and Filtering of Data Files for Objectionable Content."